



Photos by Lynn Hey / Associated Press

Melissa Hairston, an employee of Home Instead Senior Care, serves lunch to Catherine Lewis in her North Carolina home. More seniors are employing caregiving agencies, enabling older residents to live in their homes instead of going to an assisted living facility.

Retirement

Caregivers help aging seniors remain in their own homes

■ More families turn to nonmedical services to help elderly relatives handle everyday tasks.

BY EILEEN ALT POWELL *News*
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Like many of today's seniors, Catherine Lewis wants to stay in her own home as long as possible. But a fall several years ago almost ended that dream.

"She wasn't responding to physical therapy, she was having trouble moving around," says daughter Cathy Seaver of her 84-year-old mother. "I was very concerned."

The solution was to hire caregivers who visit Lewis' home in Greensboro, N.C., for several hours every day. They help her bathe, take a short walk, eat a hot lunch — even put together the snacks for her monthly bridge club gathering.

"If not for them, I would have ended up in assisted living," Lewis says. "This way, I can still enjoy my home, my neighborhood, my friends. I'm spoiled to death."

Lewis and Seaver are among a growing number of families who are turning to agencies that provide services such as light housecleaning, grocery shopping, meal preparation and companionship aimed at keeping seniors healthy — and independent — as they age.

The National Private Duty Association, an alliance of for-profit and not-for-profit caregiving agencies based in Indianapolis, has grown to nearly 700 members from just 30 three years ago, according to Sheila McMackin, the group's president. Nearly three-quarters of the members specialize in nonmedical in-home care, she said.

"A lot of trends have converged," said McMackin, a social



Catherine Lewis and her daughter, Cathy Seaver, write a grocery list. "If not for (Home Instead Senior Care) I would have ended up in assisted living," Lewis says. "This way, I can still enjoy my home..."

worker who runs the Wellspring Personal Care service in Chicago. "People are living longer, they're staying healthier ... and they're saying, 'I want to stay in my home.'"

Paul Hogan founded Home Instead Senior Care in Omaha, Neb., in the late 1990s after watching his family struggle to care for his grandmother.

"Our typical client is between the ages of 75 and 85," Hogan said. "Two-thirds are women, most of them living alone."

On average, caregivers spend about 15 hours a week with each senior at a cost of about \$1,000 a month. Most of the seniors pay for the services themselves, although in some cases children chip in, he said.

Hogan believes Home Instead services help the elderly thrive.

"If we didn't exist, there would be a lot of seniors that would do nothing," he said. "Based on what family members tell us, they're certain that because of our services their mother or father lived a lot longer — and had a much better

quality of life."

Cheryl Denney, a supervisory staff attorney with the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, said that Home Instead services greatly reduced the stress of dealing with her mother, Sue Denney, who is 86 and has Alzheimer's disease.

"Mother was getting confused," Denney said.

"She was calling me 25, maybe 30, times a day at work, at home. She didn't remember she had just called me. Sometimes she didn't remember why she was calling."

Denney said her mother resisted hiring help, "because, I think, she felt it would reduce her independence."

Her mother relented, and now a Home Instead caregiver helps her mother dress, keeps track of medications and makes sure she eats her meals. They tidy up the house together, work in the garden and go for mile-long walks in the park.

The frantic phone calls have stopped, said Denney. "It's given her her life back, and me mine."

"People are ... saying, 'I want to stay in my home.'"

SHEILA MCMACKIN
President of an alliance of
caregiving agencies

Some seniors need help for just a short time, to bridge a crisis, said Sherry W. Jerome, senior director of elder care services at the non-profit Sheltering Arms Senior Services in Houston.

"Doctors are doing a lot of outpatient surgeries, as opposed to putting the senior in the hospital, and they often need help for a while after they're released," Jerome said.

Sheltering Arms provides in-home services for about \$13 to \$18 an hour, and some state and local funding is available to subsidize the costs for low-income families.

Sheltering Arms and other agencies also provide long-term assistance, often for elderly couples.

"We often see an elder spouse struggling to take care of an ill spouse," said Lanette Gonzales, vice president for home care services at Sheltering Arms.

"Lifting a person out of bed moving them to a chair, helping them into the tub, that can be just too much," she said.

Madeline Bunjes, of Houston turned to Sheltering Arms after he husband, Emil, suffered a heart attack and debilitating stroke several years ago.

Sheltering Arms caregiver spend 12 hours a day with him Monday through Friday, helping him bathe, getting him up on his walker and taking him outside on his motorized wheelchair.